



## Nurse teacher candidates learned to use social media during the international teacher training course



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### SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to describe the nurse teacher candidates' learning outcomes and experiences in social media during the international nurse teacher training course, Empowering learning environments in nursing education, Intensive Program (ElenIP).

The pre-post research design was used. The data was collected before and after the course, with the questionnaire consisting of structured and open questions. Altogether, 24 nurse teacher candidates from four different European countries participated in the course and this study.

The results showed that the knowledge of using social media applications increased during the course from 5.2 (range 1–9) to 8.1 (range 4–10), and their skills increased from 4.5 (range 1–8) to 7.6 (range 4–10). The main topics learnt during the course were divided in two categories: subjects of the course and teaching and learning methods. The students' experiences concerning the ElenIP course were positive in both categories.

The international group created during ElenIP course also allowed the students to achieve another important aim, learning from a collaborative group the importance and possibilities of different learning environments, considering the cultural and social characteristics of each country participating in it.

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### Introduction

During the past decade, social media has become prevalent in the day-to-day life of all people, especially students (Abe and Jordan, 2013). For instance, in Finland, 92 per cent of the population aged 16 to 74 used the Internet in the year 2013 (OSF, 2014). The popularity of social media, like Facebook, Twitter, blogs and wikis, has grown exponentially (Kohtz et al., 2012). Social media offers teachers inexpensive methods of communication, collaboration and connection in real time (Peck, 2014). But teachers need more training and experience in using social media in their teaching (Tuominen et al., 2014), and there is a growing interest in using social media in education as a teaching and learning tool (Tower et al., 2014).

Occasionally, it has been debated on whether there should be a common nurse teacher education in the European Union, because the

teacher education greatly varies in European countries, even though there is a common directive (European Commission Directive 55/2013/EU) that sets the guidelines for common nursing education in Europe (Salminen et al., 2010). In Finland, together with three other European countries (Cyprus, Lithuania, Spain), we designed an international nurse teacher-training course, Empowering learning environments in nursing education, Intensive Program (ElenIP), in which the topic was social media as a teaching method in nursing education. The aim of this intensive programme was to teach social media to Doctoral and Master students who were planning to follow a nurse teaching career. The students could choose this as an optional course for their studies, and it was credited with 15 ECTS. The role of the faculty members who participated was to teach and facilitate the organisation of the course. These faculty members were academics and experienced nurse teachers in their countries.

### Background

Social media is a new opportunity to connect with students in a manner that continues to provoke thoughts and discussions outside the classroom settings despite barriers of time and distance (Abe and

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Jordan, 2013; Green et al., 2014). With different social media tools, students can also create a professional voice, expand technological abilities and enhance their ability professionally (Schmitt et al., 2012). For nurse teachers, perhaps the most important challenge is to identify how they can use social media with different generations of students and maximise the student's learning potential (Fleming et al., 2011).

Nowadays, nursing students represent multiple generations and all generations have their own unique values, ideas, ethics and cultures, as well as different learning styles (Andreou et al., 2014). Understanding these differences can help teachers in using various teaching methods to meet the needs of the students. Most of the nursing students nowadays, however, are born in the group known as the “Millennial”, born between 1982 and 2000, also known as “the net generation” or Y-generation (Johnson, 2005). This generation has grown up with computers and the Internet (Johnson, 2005), and they view new social media tools as a normal part of their life (Abe and Jordan, 2013; Peck, 2014). The majority of students think that the use of social media in the classroom is a positive thing (Abe and Jordan, 2013). There is a growing body of literature supporting social media as a viable pedagogical method, offering new possibilities to students, which can also foster non-traditional faculty development and mentoring in nursing (Green et al., 2014; Schmitt et al., 2012) as well as other health care professions (McAndrew and Johnston, 2012; Pander et al., 2014; Penick Brock et al., 2014). “We live in The Internet Age, and young people spend huge amounts of time with social media. The best way to bring courses to lives and make them more exciting, energetic and enjoyable is by using social media” (Friedman and Friedman, 2013).

Online learning offers many advantages over traditional classroom learning. The students who take courses that are either completely or partially online will perform better, on average, than students taking traditional, face-to-face courses. Courses that combine classroom learning with online learning seem to be the best of all delivery methods (Means et al., 2009). Lack of understanding about proper technology use for professional purposes continues as a barrier to nursing faculty in the adoption of new technology, such as social media in nursing education (May et al., 2013). Nurse teachers need more knowledge and possibilities to practice social media skills before they can implement technology in their classrooms. Moreover, the nurse teachers need more knowledge on how to evaluate the pedagogical usability of digital learning material. Also, the ethical issues must be constantly considered (Nokelainen, 2006; Duncan et al., 2013).

Therefore, The ElenelP course was designed to prepare future nurse teachers to utilise social media and a digital learning environment. The course curriculum was developed and implemented together with Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Klaipeda University, Cyprus University of Technology and the University of Turku. The ElenelP course consisted of pre-course assignments and readings and contact teaching, which was arranged in June 2013, at the University of Turku, Department of Nursing Science.

During this course, participants became familiar with the social media tools, environments and possibilities as well as its pedagogical advantages and disadvantages. The content of the course was designed to prepare future nurse teachers to use social media in teaching and in determining the variety of generations and their learning styles. By exploring strategies to utilise technology and digitally enhance course content, nurse teacher candidates had the possibility to learn the significance and process of incorporating social media. The main learning outcomes of the course were that participants would be ready to integrate good practices of social media and new methods into their future daily work as nurse teachers. The content of the course included how to use social media in nursing education and what demands it sets on the teacher, student, teaching process and learning environment. The teaching was performed by using social media tools and other cooperative learning methods. Simulation was taken as one part of the course, because simulation is moving to virtual learning environments (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
The content of the course.

Topics of the course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media in health care education</li> <li>• Evaluation of digital learning material and social media</li> <li>• Ethics and social media in health care education</li> <li>• Empowering clinical environment and learning outcomes</li> <li>• Evaluation of teaching methods and evidence-based teaching</li> <li>• Simulation pedagogy</li> <li>• Health care systems and health care education in EU</li> <li>• Education research methodology</li> </ul>
Teaching and learning methods used during the course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media tools (wikies, chat, YouTube, Twitter)</li> <li>• Blended learning</li> <li>• Blog writing as a learning diary</li> <li>• Cooperative teaching methods, group working</li> <li>• Simulation</li> <li>• Pre-course assignments</li> <li>• Lectures, seminars</li> <li>• Excursions</li> </ul>

There is a lack of research on nurse teachers' or nurse teacher candidates' skills or competence in using social media in their teaching (Tuominen et al., 2014). The main aim of this study is to describe nurse teacher candidates' learning outcomes and experiences with the international ElenelP course. The research questions were as follows:

- 1) What were the students' learning outcomes of the knowledge and use of social media?
- 2) What were the experiences of nurse teacher candidates with the international teacher training course on the subject of social media?

## Methods

### Design

The one group pre-post research design was used to study the learning outcomes of the ElenelP course. The ElenelP course was seen as an intervention in which effectiveness was measured (Grove et al., 2013).

### Participants and Data Collection

The data were collected in June of 2013 from the nurse teacher candidate students ( $n = 24$ ) participating in the ElenelP course, using a questionnaire consisting of structured and open questions. The students participating in this course were selected by their own Universities. The selection criteria were interest and motivation on the subject of the course, bachelor qualifications, tutor teacher's recommendation and adequate English language skills.

The data were collected at the beginning and at the end of the ElenelP course. The coordinator teacher of the course delivered the paper-and-pencil questionnaires and the envelopes with which the students returned their questionnaires. All the participants returned the questionnaires. The respondent rate was 100%.

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was created for this study and was based on the literature (Schmitt et al., 2012; Tuominen et al., 2014). The questionnaire consisted of six background factors (age, gender, nationality, education level, the use of social media in daily life and in studies), four structured questions concerning the self-evaluations of students' learning outcomes and four open questions. The students were asked to evaluate their learning outcomes with a Visual Analogical scale (VAS) from 0 to 10 (0 = not at all, 10 = very good). A Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) is a measurement instrument that measure a characteristic or attitude that is believed to range across a continuum of values and cannot easily be directly measured (Gould et al., 2001). VAS is a line 100 mm (10 cm)

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